Careful reading for either a new portfolio essay or the timed-essay exam includes these strategies:

- Make sure you identify and understand the key terms that the various authors use to develop their arguments. The more accurately you can define the key terms, the better your analysis of the issue will be.

- Demonstrate that you are correctly summarizing an author's ideas by citing important (and short) passages from the readings as evidence.

- As you read an article, try to formulate probable exam questions for the timed essay. Make marginal notes only on the printed side of the readings; your notes should identify the structure of an author's argument, and particularly the evidence used in each paragraph to support and develop the author's thesis, hypothesis, or central idea. This will help you form your own ideas about the problem presented in the readings and allow you to locate passages to analyze and to support your thesis or central idea when you start to write.

- Analyze and evaluate the major ideas and topics from each reading and see how they are related to the other articles. Try to establish particular connections by naming the conclusions that each author arrives at about the problem. Do some of the articles seem to support each other or does one seem to refute another? Does one author argue with more persuasive evidence than the others?

- When you read and reread the question, look for the words that tell you what concept you are expected to analyze. What relationship are you being asked to focus on -- e.g., does the question ask you to explain how some ideas or issues in the readings relate to other material or issues or ideas in the readings? Look for key concepts that you must address, and look for words that limit or qualify your tasks. You may want to write the important terms in the question on your scratch paper. Doing so may help you decide how to organize your essay.

- Generally, the readings will discuss the same problem, events, or issues, but from different points of view. How do they propose alternative ways of understanding or evaluating the material? Do the articles represent an historical sequence? Are some of the readings primary sources and others secondary sources of information? Or, are some of the articles analytical, while, others present a strong interpretation?

- If you can articulate a relationship among the articles, you have a way of synthesizing them around your thesis, hypothesis, or central idea. Can you generate another possible explanation of the problem? Are there aspects from argument of one or more authors that support your explanation? Do you think that one author has the best explanation for the problem? If so, why? What do the other authors miss that this author gets right? Does any author have weaknesses in his or her argument, or do they all?
• Do not oversimplify the readings' ideas or try to polarize them if they are not totally contradictory. If a question asks you how likely a result is, that is an indication that what you are being asked to discuss a range of probability. Organize your discussion around your position rather than by lining up the readings into a pros and cons format. Acknowledge that the authors' viewpoints are complex or that their judgments are qualified.

• Organizing or clustering related ideas is only one part of planning. Planning also involves listing definitions of key terms, summarizing particularly important and complicated ideas that are central to your argument, evaluating if there is a general agreement about the key terms between the authors in a reading set, evaluating if each author has gathered evidence to support their definition, and forming some tentative short responses that start to stake out your position on the disputed terms or your response to the disputed issue (thesis statement). You need not complete these activities in any set order. Instead, you will probably shuttle back and forth among them. As you generate ideas, collect data, and organize on scratch paper, just use key words or phrases that you can turn into sentences once you begin to draft your essay or that indicate the full quotation that you plan to include.

• As you draft your essay, concentrate on expressing your ideas simply and clearly through analysis of quotes. It is important to choose quotations that demonstrate your exact point, that provide evidence to support your thesis, or central idea, and that you analyze in close and sufficient detail. Never assume that the reader understands what you want them to see; always lead the reader into the quote and then afterwards analyze how it proves your point.

• As you are revising, check your paragraphs to make sure that they are unified and that each supports one aspect of your thesis. Remember that each paragraph should lead to the next paragraph. Transitions between paragraphs help show the structure of your argument because they act as signposts to readers, helping to show them the connection or relationship between your ideas.